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# PART V

# THE PRODUCTION OF FOOD

## CHAPTER XIII

## LAND, AND LAND TENURE

*Introduction.*

000 THE food-supply of any territory must depend on two sets of factors—the physical properties of the environment itself, and the customs and traditional lore of the people who are trying to exploit it. It is as necessary to know the methods by which the people of a particular district produce their food, their economic motives, and the rules that govern the use of the land's resources, as it is to know the nature of the soil, its vegetation and fauna, or its general climatic conditions; and it is the former aspect which the anthropologist contributes to the study of native agriculture. I shall describe, therefore, the general attitude of the Bemba to their environment, their system of land tenure and land selection, their agricultural, hunting, and fishing activities, their seasonal calendar, their type of economic co-operation, and the religious and magic beliefs that affect their production of food.

123 As an anthropologist, I was of course anxious from the start to see as much as I could of the food-producing activities of the people, since for the majority of the Bemba, even at the present day, these fill the bulk of their time. Living consecutively in different types of village, I was able to watch a variety of agricultural processes. These I have tried to describe as far as possible in the natives' own terms rather than in those of modern agricultural science, since my aim was to study the Bemba's own rudimentary principles of cultivation, as these determined their food-production. With regard to the land, I was unable to classify the [134] different types of soil, since no survey had as yet been made in the area,[1] but I considered it my function to collect the terms usually used by natives to describe the soils they cultivated, and to note their customary method of assessing the fertility of any

[1] The ecological survey now being made in N. E. Rhodesia had not then been undertaken.

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241 He will even make two small gardens (*tukumbi*, *sing. kakumbi*)
242 instead of one larger one, rather than sow on a patch which has been barren of trees (*kasesuebebe*).

*Soil Types Recognized.*

241 Besides his use of trees and grasses as indicators, the Bemba
242 classifies different soils according to their colour, texture, and the
134 type of country in which they are found. Thus they speak of—

(1) *Sand soils—Umushili wa nsenga* or *wa buta* (white)—a general term used to describe the white sandy soil which is common on the plateau. This soil they divide up into two types, *ulusenga lukalamba* (strong sand), i.e. the best type of sandy soil, and the *ulusenga lusono* ('weak sand') on which they realize that very little will grow. Sandy soils are also described with reference to their dryness or dampness. Thus *umushili wa nyika* refers to the damper soil of one of the marshy plains or open valleys referred to as a *nyika*, and *umushili wa lupili* (hill soil) is supposed to hold the moisture, according to the native account, 'because the hill puts a shadow over it', while the loose soil at the bottom of a hill, *umushili wa cisuno*, is dry and poor.

On these sandy soils the Bemba grow millet, Kaffir corn, legumes, ground-nuts, cassava, and sweet potatoes, but they do not hope to get two crops of millet from the poorer type of sand, and say they prefer to plant Kaffir corn on the redder, more loamy, soils. Legumes bear more heavily, they say, in the richer sandy soils, and cassava grows 'as thick as a man's arm' when it is in 'the great sand' or in soil by the river banks.

(2) *Red soil—Umushili wa kashika* or *umushili wa nkanka*—is a rich red clay loam which is said to stick together in lumps 'like porridge'. This type of soil fills the Bemba with enthusiasm. 'That is the soil for food', they cry. Any crop will grow on it they think, but it is the soil specially selected for Kaffir corn. They point out that Kaffir corn grown on sand will bear stunted plants after the first year, but when sown on red soil produces fine heads for three or four years. Only ground-nuts are sometimes described as growing better on sandy than on red soils.

(3) *Black soil—Umushili wa fita.* This term covers various types of soil, described as being 'strong' (*wakosa*), as sticky to the touch (*watelela*), or as not running through the fingers easily (*wakyafutuka*). Sometimes it contains clay (*we lamba*), especially the very black soil

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by the banks of a river (*na matipa*), which is so stiff that the Bemba tell of a typical nightmare in which the dreamer is trying frantically to run, but each time his foot gets caught and held in the *matipa* mud. In fact, *umushili na fita* is a colour description rather than a classification and covers various dark soils—peats, &c. of different characteristics. But Bemba say black earth is good for cultivation and is not easily exhausted. Maize grows well on it, but it is considered bad for cassava and sweet potatoes, and not the best for ground-nuts. 241 242 1340

Ant-hills (*ifyala*) are believed to be composed of special soil, and on the flat plain of the Chambesi bed, near Molema, the people, who have no trees to cut for gardens, cultivate almost entirely on the slopes of these small hillocks. Millet is said not to flourish on them, but Kaffir corn and maize grow to a good height.

(4) *Refuse soil—Umufundo.* In selecting ground for their mound cultivation (*mputa*) the Bemba value very highly the sites of deserted villages, which they believe to be particularly fertile. Of any soil which has been enriched either through its own vegetation or by previous cultivation, the turning in of grasses to rot, or the remains of human habitation, they use the word *umufundo*, which seems to describe a particular quality of ripeness or maturity.[1] Of this type of soil the native speaks with a conviction and enthusiasm which contrasts sharply with the hesitating way in which he casts his vote for other types of ground. Contemplating the soil of an *icibolya*, or the high grasses on an ant-hill, he will cry with ardour, '*E mufundo!*' his voice rising high in tone—the usual sign of delighted conviction. He will be endlessly ready to talk about *umufundo*, and to account for its properties. The deserted *mputa* of a previous village are fertile, he says, because of the decaying vegetation on them, and the rich crop of grass which grows in the cleared space now unimpeded by bushes. The natives say that the amount of refuse thrown out daily on the *mputa* makes them fertile, and it must be remembered that the chaff of millet is thrown out every day after the threshing from every house in the village, during a period of three or four years. At Kacienja village I found the headman looking round for some deserted *mputa* on which to make his new village; and around Kasama, where the country is covered with old village sites, the natives anxiously search for signs of the undulations left by disused mounds of earlier

[1] It is also applied to any crop which is beginning to swell and ripen.

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241 cultivators. The site of the village itself is also believed to provide
242 a very rich soil, because 'many things have lain and rotted there'
●134 and because of 'the many footsteps of people passing'.

241 Most natives will add that human excrement makes soil rich.
514 A specially fine crop of cassava has been explained to me as due to
5% the excrement of children. But here there is a certain amount of contradiction. No Bemba will admit that an adult could ever defaecate on a village bed. This would be strictly counter to etiquette, among a people who have a horror of touching night-soil. Only small children would commit such a breach of good manners, it is maintained, in spite of ocular evidence that the rule is sometimes broken. Hence a native will admit that the fertility of an old village site is partly due to human manure which gives it *umafundo*, but will scold children for using the *mpata* for such purposes. At Canda we Eiya an enraged woman even threatened to call down a curse (*ukulapishya*) on the children who had evidently defaecated on her garden beds. She screamed out, 'You children, you! You go on defaecating on my cassava, you! You make us eat excrement. That is not a good thing, no! I am really going to put a curse on you this time.' It is not surprising, therefore, that in the few places where cattle are kept, the natives object strongly to the idea of using kraal manure.

241 House sites themselves (*ifitantala*) become a heap of rubble and decaying sticks after the hut walls have been demolished, and a season's rain has fallen on the ruins. After a year, or perhaps two, the raised mound on which the house stood formerly is soft enough to plant. The Bemba sow maize on it or tobacco plants. Whether the surface soil has a high percentage of lime from the plaster walls, or is merely rich in nitrogenous matter from the hut refuse, it is clear to the naked eye that maize flourishes on these *ifitantala*. At Kungu village in April 1934, the plants grown on the deserted house sites were 3 feet higher than those planted elsewhere. This frequent use of the soil of village sites is an important point. Most Europeans in the district look forward to the day when the Bemba will build permanent houses and adopt fixed cultivation. There would be obvious advantages in such a course from many points of view, but on this poor soil, in the absence of cattle manure, the practice of shifting huts, while continuing to use the deserted site, gives the Bemba the richest soil they have for certain crops, such as maize and the various cucurbits.

separation from the Lunda, the Aushi were led by one Mwe, a commoner, who 'discovered' Mukumbe and whose son Chabala became the first Paramount Chief. This Chabala was subsequently killed in a disastrous war with Kazembe's Lunda but was avenged by Mukumbe who forthwith despatched a famine to the victors who had to sue for forgiveness. Mukumbe subsequently saved the Aushi again in an equally unsuccessful resistance against the Ba-Yeke.(1) The later history of the group in the closing years of the last century and the first thirty of this was occupied with a series of disputes over the paramountcy. While previously the Paramount held both secular and spiritual power - as guardian of Mukumbe - this period witnessed the split of the paramountcy into two, a secular and a spiritual chief. This division of function lasted until 1933. 175

The Unga are thought to be of Luba origin, and to have migrated with the Bemba and other groups in the 18th century from the west, subsequently splitting off from them with the Mukulu and Ngumbu, who later came under Aushi authority.(2) With the Chishinga and Kwendi they form a closely related block. In fact the Unga trace their ultimate descent from an ancestress, Kaundamwelwa, from whose daughters the Ngumbu, Mukulu, Chishinga and Unga trace their more immediate ancestry.(3) Their later history is one of inter-tribal quarrels and of occasional raids by the Bemba when the water-level in the swamps fell low enough to permit land-travel.

The Twa, one of a number of swamp-dwelling peoples of that name,(4) seem to have been well established in the area at the time when the Unga arrived.(5) Von Rosen, who spent some time in the area with a Swedish ethnological expedition, considers that they, along with the other groups in the area, originally came from the Congo and were of Luba stock.(6) They were at enmity with the Unga until very recently - 1943 - and as early as 1916 were made to settle at Kansenga outside Unga territory, but throughout the years of contact have intermarried freely with the Unga.

## PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The soils of the area are generally poor, of a thin sandy character, and are covered by deciduous woodland, predominantly of the type *Brachystegia-Isoberlinia*. In the Lake Basin, however, a high grass woodland (*chipya*) predominates, in which very tall grass grows mixed in with various types of tree. Largely deciduous, this type of woodland is remarkable for dense evergreen thickets. 134 137

The climate is characterised by a single rainy season in which generally more than adequate rainfall is assured. On the Central Plateau an average of 45 inches per year is customary, decreasing in the east and north-west and rising in the Lake Basin area. 132

The annual mean variation of temperature on the Central Plateau appears to be 55°-84°F.

(1) Mwe and Bruce, 1935. see Ba-Yeke.
(2) See Philpot, 1936.
(3) Brelsford, S. 1946.
(4) Mun., N.A.D.A. 1948.
(5) Brelsford, op.cit.
(6) Von Rosen, 1914.

valley, and the substantial stockades of Senga chiefs on which Fraser[1] commented bore witness to the fear in which these raiders were held. 174

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

As stated above the Senga inhabit the Upper Luangwa valley, at an altitude of some 3,000 ft. decreasing to the south. It is a region for which adequate climatological data are not available but the rainfall is probably less than on the Plateau with an average of 30-35" annually. The probable temperature range is from 65°F. (mean min.) to 88°F. (mean max.). 132 133

The soils generally are more fertile than those on the Plateau, especially close to the river, and are of a heavier texture and darker colour. A type of woodland (*Isoberlinia - Globiflora - Brachystegia*) common to the Plateau is found on the western banks of the Luangwa, but the valley floor and the eastern banks are covered with *Dapane* scrub-land, in which the trees attain a fair height near the river but are stunted towards the escarpment. 134 137

MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY

The shifting cultivation on the sterile soils of the Plateau gives way in the valley, potentially at any rate, to semi-permanent cultivation. Maize, finger millet and Kaffir corn are the most important crops, each of which is found locally as a staple. There are various sequences, from a millet-Kaffir corn sequence in northern districts to a millet-Kaffir corn or maize-groundnut sequence in districts in contact with the mixed Bisa-Cewa groups of the Middle Luangwa and on the eastern banks towards Lundazi. 241

In both sequences new sites are first cleared of trees and the branches and brushwood burnt. Later, in the first sequence, the grass which grows up in the clearing is cut down and left to rot helped by the first rain; this forms the seed bed for the millet - some maize had already been scattered before the grass was cut - and little subsequent weeding is carried out. Kaffir corn may be sown in the following year or, alternatively, in the third year after a second millet crop. A few pumpkins and cucurbits are also found.

In the second sequence, after preliminary clearing, there is less tendency to use rotting grass as a seed bed, but to leave it standing to manure subsequent crops. Millet is planted with maize and in the following year Kaffir corn and maize are planted in varying proportions in a seed bed of grass-manure left from the previous year. In some areas maize may be planted alone and a simple millet-maize sequence carried on for up to ten years. On lighter soils groundnuts may be planted in the third year.

Apart from this groundnuts are normally grown in separate gardens. Small gardens for maize in the dry season and rice cultivation are locally found, as is tobacco, particularly in Chinsali district. Village gardens are not properly found in the area but small plots of sweet potatoes, cassava, beans and pawpaw are commonly found near villages.

(1) Fraser, 1914.

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(c) Economic Background. The Bemba are an agri-cultural people



like most of the Central Bantu group to which they belong. They keep no cattle. Tsetse-fly at present prevents their keeping stock over most of the country, but in any case they seem to have no pastoral traditions, whatever they may have had formerly. Thus they have no means of storing wealth as have the Southern Bantu. Their marriage contracts are fulfilled by service and not by the passage of cattle. In the old days military glory and the extraction of tribute from conquered peoples seems to have been the dominant ambition of the Bemba chiefs, and their wealth consisted in the size of their following and the amount of service they were able to command. This fact profoundly influences their position at the present day (cf. p. 116).

The soil of most of this district is poor and it has not attracted white settlement. The staple crop is finger millet (*eleusine coracana*), while some kafir corn, a little maize, legumes, and pumpkins are also grown. The people practise shifting cultivation of a primitive type, and the plentiful supply of land and the lack of any localized natural resources which might attract the inhabitants to settle in one area rather than another all affect the political system. As has been shown, they decrease the strength of local ties as against political or kinship affiliations, and they account for the fact that the power to distribute land is not an important prerogative of leadership in distinction to conditions in most Southern Bantu tribes.

Hunting and fishing contribute a small share of the food-supply only. Organized marketing does not exist, and under modern conditions no cash crop has been found for this area. This fact, together with the absence of opportunities for local employment, forces the adult male population to look for work outside the tribal area, with resultant effects, as will be seen, on the political system of the tribe.

(*d*) *White Administration.* The type of white administration introduced in this area is described on pp. 112–20.

### *III. Bases of Authority*

The positions of leadership in Bemba society consist of the following offices: (*a*) *territorial rulers* (chiefs and headmen); (*b*) *administrative officers and councillors*; (*c*) *priests, guardians of sacred shrines, and magic specialists with economic functions*; (*d*) *army leaders* in the old days. Succession to all these offices is

131 towards the Luapula and, in several respects, markedly differing from the surrounding plateau country.

226 The abundance of fish in the Luapula, which is free from rapids and easily navigable below Johnston Falls near the mouth of the Lunga, makes fishing an important economic pursuit in which virtually all the adult male population participate and to which are attached elaborate ritual observances. (see below p.94) Besides being an important item in the native [499] diet, fish constitutes the chief trading asset of the country.

● 134 On the plateau, where soils are poorer and the population is almost exclusively dependent on agriculture for its livelihood, the shifting citemene system of cultivation is the rule. In the valley, however, the 241 rich alluvial deposits make possible a semi-permanent mound cultivation; this removes the necessity for changing village sites periodically and results in a greater stability. Cassava, of little account on the plateau, where finger millet and Kaffir corn predominate, is the staple food crop in the valley.

186 Common traditions accumulated over two centuries, during which the valley constituted the core of Kazembe's kingdom, have made the population conscious and proud of its past.

611 The patrilineal reckoning of descent introduced and established by the Lunda, as well as their tribal heterogeneity, mark the valley peoples off from the matrilineal and ethnically homogeneous neighbouring tribes: the Shila-Katya (north west), Shila (north), Lungu, Chishinga (east), Nkoshe, Aushi (south), Lamba (south-west), and Lomotwa (west).

631 The Kazembe is now Paramount over the western (Northern Rhodesia) side of the valley, ruling directly in the province surrounding his capital. His kingdom is divided into eight chiefdoms, ruled by the following chiefs (from Lake Mweru southward): Kashwali, Kanyembo, Kazembe himself, Lubwese, Lubamba, Kashiba, Mulundu, and Katota. Sub-chiefs Mayembe and Kapesa administer two districts carved out of the metropolitan chiefdom but cannot hold courts. Lubumba, Mulundu, Katota and Kapesa are of Chishinga extraction, the others are Lunda.

Kilwa island, with its Swahili chief Nakimba, now falls outside the Kazembe's kingdom.

TRIBAL MIXTURE

166 As a result of piecemeal settlement and frequent inter-marriage the component tribal groups are as a rule distributed over the whole territory.
619 Local concentrations occur nevertheless: the Shila and Tabwa predominate in the extreme north, the Lungu in the Mkele district, the Chishinga in the Mumushi valley. A Bemba colony occupies land between Lake Mofwe and Lake Mweru granted to Mwamkupa in return for the assistance given by his brother Mwaba, a Bemba chief, in opposing the invading Bayeke and re-establishing the fugitive Kazembe. On Kilwa island the descendants of Swahili slavers and Nyamwezi copper traders live alongside the aboriginal Shila.

The bulk of the population is made up of the Shila, Lunda, Chishinga,

A grey-brown, richly humic soil, permeable and retentive of moisture, alternates locally with loams and sandy loams. The underlying ironstone beds outcrop in the bushland towards the escarpment. Large ant-hills containing lime nodules are a characteristic feature in an area of otherwise non-calcareous soil.(1) Livingstone(2) mentions hot sources "at which maize and cassava can be boiled" south of Kalungwishi. They are more typical of the country farther north. Among the chipya vegetation (mixed deciduous woodland with tall grasses and bracken), now predominant, there still survive on moister sites patches of dense evergreen thicket (mateshi), remnants of the equatorial rain forest which must have prevailed in the earlier, more humid regime. 134 [133] 137

## MAIN FEATURES OF ECONOMY

### AGRICULTURE(3)

Cassava, the staple crop, is planted on rectangular or, more often, round mounds which remain in semi-permanent cultivation with periodic fallows. Rotted grass turf is used as manure. Groundnuts and, in Shila villages, ground-beans, an important subsidiary crop, are usually grown on newer land. Balls of groundnuts stored in the trees are a characteristic feature in the villages. Sweet potatoes, maize, beans, pumpkins, Kaffir corn, are also cultivated in the main gardens. Cowpeas, edible gourds, and castor oil are grown as catch crops. Finger millet is grown for beer. Occasionally accompanied by bulrush millet and cattle melons, it occupies the thicket (north of Mbereshi) and, more usually, the small citemene gardens, measuring up to one-third of an acre each, on the clearings in the foothill woodland. These gardens, encountered more frequently among the Chishinga-Lunda than among the Shila, are abandoned after a few years' exploitation. Small matimbo gardens under early maturing varieties of maize (consumed green), rice, bananas and sugar cane are made on the moist and very fertile acacia dambos east of Lake Mweru. These are more characteristic of the Bwile country. Rice plots, particularly exposed to the depredations of birds, are protected by bark rope birdscarers, and shelters are erected for the watchers to keep off the hippo. Pineapples, mangoes and pawpaws are successfully grown in the area as in oil-palm, which is common on Kilwa island. Tobacco, Asiatic and white yams, Lima beans, chillies, sesame, and cotton, are among the minor crops grown in the village gardens alongside the huts. Castor oil is planted for fences in some Chishinga-Lunda villages. Irrigated wheat is found on mission farms and an attempt has been made to introduce coffee as a cash crop. 241 [249]

### LIVESTOCK

Prevalence of tsetse fly, as well as the lack of pastoral traditions, were responsible for the virtual absence of cattle. Lukwesa (1760-1805) kept a few head of black cattle as a matter of prestige.(4) They were neither milked nor killed for meat and could graze where they pleased on the cultivated land of his subjects.(5) Lately the keeping of cattle has been 231 [554]

(1) Livingstone, I, p.267.
(2) Based on C. G. Trapnell.
(3) Carson, op.cit., p.129.
(4) ibid., p.270.
(5) Gouldsbury, I, p.390.